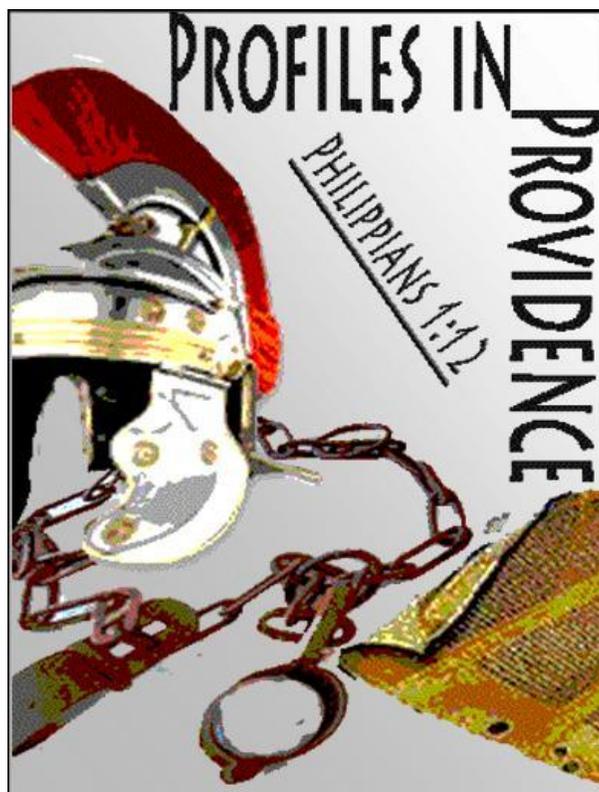


Basic Training Bible Ministries

“Profiles in Providence”

A Study in the Book of Philippians



Northern Virginia Bible Conference

Spring 2008

Profiles in Providence From the Book of Philippians

Introduction

The book of Philippians is a fascinating study of many topics, all bound up in one great theme: the finished work of Christ in His death and resurrection (Phi 2:5–11). It is a letter of thanksgiving to the Philippian church (Phi 1:3; 4:10, 14). It is a letter of encouragement to them as they face many trials (Phi 1:28–30). In it, Paul gives an update on his prison status (Phi 1:12–18), and news of one of their own members who was with him (Phi 2:25–30). Above these things, it is a call to enter into the unshakeable joy of those who know that Jesus Christ controls human history.

It is here we begin to see the over-arching truth that runs through this epistle: the Providence of God. By this we mean the outworking of the redemptive purpose of God in the lives of His people. In other passages (Eph 1:9, 11), Paul tells us that God is at work *“according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself,”* so that He *“works all things according to the counsel of His will.”* In simpler terms, he says *“we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”* (Rom 8:28). Here we find a caveat, we might say, regarding the providence of God. While God is at work behind the scenes in each and every circumstance, the full benefits of His eternal plan are enjoyed only by those believers who—because of their love for Him—are devoted to His call on their life.

To properly define how *“all things”* of this life can *“work together for good,”* we need to see life from God’s perspective, and purify our definition of what is *“good”* from God’s point of view. The foundational passage on providence in Scripture is found in Gen 22:1–14. Here God calls Abraham (*“father of believers”*—Rom 4:12, 16) to offer up Isaac, the son of promise. Abraham acts without reservation, knowing that Christ must come through Isaac, and concluding that God will, if necessary, raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:17–19). Questioned by Isaac on the way to the mount, Abraham affirms, *“God will provide.”* When his obedience is proved, God provides a ram, just as Abraham had said He would (Gen 22:8). Abraham then names the place *“Jehovah Jireh”* (*The Lord will provide*). We get *“providence”* from the Latin *pro* meaning *“before”* and *video*, meaning *“to see.”* Putting the two together we have *“provide.”*

Think about the doctrinal truths Abraham considered and acted upon. He relied on God’s sovereignty (His authority and rule over all), and His omniscience (knowing the end from the beginning). Abraham trusted in His omnipotence (His power to give life to the dead); he found rest and comfort in His omnipresence, knowing God was with him and would not forsake him. In fact, this passage contains the first occurrence of the word *“worship”* (Gen 22:5) along with all the elements of faith, surrender, obedience, and praise that define it. In light of his conduct, Abraham is identified with the kind of faith that trusts in *“God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did ... being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform”* (Rom 4:17, 21).

Biblical Statements on Providence

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, in order to save many people alive” (Gen 50:20).

“And it so happened ...” (with variations) (Rut 1:19; 2:3; 3:8; Est 5:1): This phrase reminds us that nothing ever “just happens,” but all is under the control of an all wise and all-powerful heavenly Father who works in love.

“On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them” (Est 9:1b).

“The good hand of the Lord God upon me ...” (variations) (Ezr 7:28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 2:8, 18).

“The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” (Dan 4:32b).

“Not one of them [sparrows] falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (Mat 10:29; Luk 12:6).

“But the very hairs of your head are numbered” (Mat 10:30).

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:11–12).

How to Study the Bible

Most of us have learned the value of the I.C.E. principle. That is:

Isagogics—the study of historical and cultural background.

Categories—the development of specific doctrines in the text.

Exegesis—the analysis of the grammar and syntax of the original text.

However valuable these are, they are not sufficient in themselves. Following are some examples of how we need to approach the Word of God.

Illustrations:

Do a google search on each one of these; consider the applications:

1. The blind men and the Elephant (look at the whole, not just part, of a book).
2. Professor Agassiz and the Fish (painstaking attention to minute detail is the key).
[From “Expository Preaching” pg. 212–215, John MacArthur, Jr.]

3. How to Master the English Bible (take a book of the Bible; read it every day for a month). [Dr. James M. Gray (1904), cf. pg.31–32]

My poor attempt to define the personal providence of God is as follows:

Providence is the outworking of God's redemptive plan in the lives of His saints, according to the pattern of the cross and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the most unpromising and unexpected events, He is at work on behalf of the trusting and surrendered soul, to bring light out of darkness, life out of death, power out of weakness, victory out of defeat, and glory out of shame. By His wisdom, power, and presence, He intends to lead the believer through the cross and into the resurrection power of our risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, with great joy."

Listen again to some of Paul's statements:

He says, "[I] do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph 1:16–21).

Furthermore: "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us ..." (Eph 3:14–20).

Now consider one of the key verses of the book of Philippians:

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as excrement that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phi 3:7–11).

In these few verses we see God's sovereignty, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence at work in the life of the Apostle Paul. We also see Paul's faith, surrender, obedience, victory, and great joy. These topics will run through this epistle.

Philippians and Ecclesiastes

It may be thought that no two Bible books could be further apart in content. When we ask, “What is Philippians about?” most people will say, “*joy and rejoicing*.” If we ask the same question about Ecclesiastes, the likely answer is “*vanity, emptiness*.” I would like to give you a different perspective. In Philippians, the words “joy” and “rejoicing” occur about 14 times. Yet we have roughly the same occurrence in the book of Ecclesiastes!

In Philippians, we have rejoicing in the forefront, with sorrow and affliction in the background. In Ecclesiastes, we see life’s futility (apart from faith) in the forefront, but with rejoicing in the background, for those who will “*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth*” (Ecc 12:1), will “*Fear God and keep His commandments*” (Ecc 12:13), and will “*In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other*” (Ecc 7:14). Because faith brings God’s power into the equation of the brokenness of life, the believer can still “*enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage ... to rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God*” (Ecc 5:18–19).

Let me suggest an analogy of seeing these two books as two complimentary paintings hanging on the wall. In the first painting, we see a time of war and suffering in the forefront. We see a sort of collage in which the husband and father is on the battlefield, the wife at home with the children. We see in their faces loneliness, fears, doubts, and trials. But in the background, coming from the minds of each one, is the looking forward to the joyful homecoming and reunion at war’s end. That is Ecclesiastes—a broken world, yet we see healing and rejoicing in the shadows. Next, we see another picture, this one with the homecoming. The wife and children are gathered, we see the husband coming from the plane, and their faces are lit with great joy and celebration. Yet if we look closely, we see the shadows of past trials and privations. The victory has come at great cost and dedication. This is the book of Philippians. If you read these two books in concert, you will begin to see them both in a new light. Let’s consider the events leading up to the epistle we are studying. Here we will see “the hand of God” at work in every detail.

Providential Background to the Book

1. Consider first of all the providential hand of God at work in human history. Jesus Christ was born “*when the fullness of time had come*” (Gal 4:4). By God’s design the civilized world was under one government (Rome), speaking one language (Greek), and accessible by the greatest road system ever devised. Additionally, the scattering of the Jews throughout the empire made the Scriptures of the Old Testament available on a worldwide scale.
2. Consider the fruit of persecution in Act 8:1–4. Here, Saul of Tarsus plays an instrumental role in instigating persecution against Christians. Those who were scattered carry the Gospel everywhere (Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, Act 1:8). Then, Saul is saved (is renamed Paul), and now Paul carries the Gospel “to the

uttermost,” becoming the target of the very persecution which he began. And out of it all, God is glorified and Christ is magnified!

3. Paul’s first visit to Philippi, Act 16:12:
 - a. Paul, Silas (15:40), Timothy (16:1–3), and Luke (16:10) are in Troas.
 - b. The Macedonian call (16:9) comes following three closed doors (16:6–8).
 - c. The Church began with Lydia, from a women’s prayer group (16:13–15).
 - d. The incident of the demon-possessed girl (16:16–18) brings persecution.
 - e. The resulting uproar and imprisonment (16:19–24) seems a great setback.
 - f. Then, songs in the night, deliverance, the jailor is saved (16:25–34).
 - g. Thus Paul impacts Romans (jailor), Greeks (girl), and Asians (Lydia).

4. Paul’s Roman Imprisonment, Act 21–28:
 - a. Paul is arrested in Jerusalem (Act 21).
 - b. After an assassination attempt, he is transferred to Caesarea (Act 22–23).
 - c. Under false accusation, he appeals to Caesar (Act 24–26).
 - d. Following this, the voyage, shipwreck on Malta, and house arrest in Rome (Act 27–28).
 - e. From his Roman prison Paul writes the letter to the Philippians.

Consider Paul’s experiences in these places:

“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us ...” (2Co 1:8–10).

And again: *“For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the down cast, comforted us by the coming of Titus...” (2Co 7:5–6).*

When we read passages like 2Co 6:4–10 or 2Co 11:23–33, we begin to get a glimpse of the sufferings behind a letter such as Philippians, and begin to appreciate Paul’s victorious attitude based on his conviction of the providential working of God through them all.

Note: The Philippian believers “saw” how Paul dealt with persecution firsthand, then later “heard” how he continued to meet it in Rome (cf. Phi 1:30). Meanwhile, they face ongoing persecution and opposition themselves (Phi 1:28–30). Paul is challenging them to follow his example, just as he follows Jesus Christ (Phi 3:17).

The Five Profiles

1. Jesus Christ (Phi 2:5–11)
Here we have the ultimate example of a life conducted in total trust and reliance on the will of the Father (cf. 1Pe 2:19–25). Here we see that, to the degree of His humiliation, He is exalted by the Father (cf. Jam 4:10; 1Pe 5:6).
2. Paul, the living example (Phi.1:12; 3:7–14; 4:11–13)
The apostle followed His Lord, and was able to write, “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*” (1 Co.11:1; 4:16).
3. Timothy, student of Paul (Phi 2:19–24)
Paul says of Timothy that, “as a son with his father he served with me” (Phi 2:22).
4. Epaphroditus, minister from Philippi (Phi 2:25–30)
The five-fold description given here is a good gauge of progressive growth.
5. The Philippians (Phi 1:3–11, 27–30; 2:12–18; 3:17–21; 4:8-9)
No other early church so closely followed the life and teachings of Paul.

The profiles above all have several things in common:

1. All came through great suffering and affliction.
2. All surrendered themselves to an all-wise God and His purpose.
3. All found, even in the midst of trial, a deep and abiding joy in His presence.
4. All learned that afflictions only deepened their relationship to the Lord.
5. All become a testimony to the providence of God, His power to work good out of great evil and sufferings.

Principle: The working principle of providence is bringing life out of death (Gen 22:1–19). What God did through the cross of Christ (resurrection out of death) is what He wants to do through all our trials (Review Abraham, Rom 4:16–24).

Basic Outline: [with adaptations from Dennis Mock, “New Testament Survey,” and from Hamilton Smith, “Christian Experience;” Scripture Truth Publications.]

Philippians: The Mind of Christ and the Providence of God (Key Verses: Phi 2:5–8)

It is worth noting that Paul speaks of “*mind*,” in the sense of attitude and motivation, 11 times through the book. This “mind-set” comes from an understanding of and acting on the knowledge of the providential working of God, or, in one case (3:19) failure to do so.

I. Chapter 1: The Providential Outcome of Prison

A. The Single Mind (Phi 1:12, 21)

Principle: Because Jesus Christ is my life (Phi 1:21), I can trust Him to bring good out of every situation (Phi 1: 6, 12, 29).

1. Paul's affection and prayer for the Philippians (Phi 1:1–11, especially 1:6). Here we see many elements and evidences of providence at work.
2. Paul's report on God's victory in his imprisonment (Phi 1:12–26; 1:12, 21). God's providence brings blessing out of the most unexpected conditions.
3. Paul's exhortation to overcome adversities (Phi 1:27–30). Understanding providence, we see our trials as special gifts (Jam 1:2).

B. Principles of Application (Act 1)

Illustration: “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (cf. Act 1:8) ... therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word.” (Act 8:1, 4).

C. Greeting: The Providential Founding of Philippi (Act 1:1–2)

1. The providence of God can be seen in the history of Philippi.
2. The providence of God is evident in Paul's first visit (Act 16).
3. Again, Paul's Roman imprisonment displays providence (Act 21–28).

D. God's Providence at work among the Philippians (Phi 1:3–11)

1. We see God's providence in the ingredients of Paul's prayer (Phi 1:3–4).
2. The Philippians participate by their active fellowship (Phi 1:5 cf. 4:15).
3. This provides the basis for Paul's confident assertion regarding them (Phi 1:6, 7).
4. Such *esprit* cannot help but result in compassionate rapport (Phi 1:8).
5. The constant desire for greater fruitfulness is also requested (Phi 1:9–11a).
6. The result of such lives is the ultimate glory of God (Phi 1:11b).

E. Paul's Testimony of Providential Power (Phi 1:12–26)

1. Providence works contrary to common expectations (Phi 1:12a).
2. God's redemptive purpose is the advancement of the gospel (Phi 1:12b).
3. One bold life of faith results in great impact on other believers (Phi 1:13–14).
4. With every advance comes the inevitability of spiritual conflict (Phi 1:15–17).
5. “*Rejoicing*” is the celebration of God's victory in advance (Phi 1:18–21).
6. Human perplexity dissolves in the face of God's certainties (Phi 1:22–26).

F. Principle: The providence of God is always at work in every circumstance of life, whether great or small. Following the pattern of the cross, God works good out of the most unpromising and unexpected situations. However, only those believers

living in submission and obedience will see His hand at work for their blessing and His glory (cf. Joh 14:21, 23).

G. The Exhortation from Paul's Experience (Phi 1:27–30).

1. Believers should live as heavenly citizens (Phi 1:27a cf. 3:20). The word “conduct” (Phi 1:27) is from the same root as “citizenship” (Phi 3:20).
2. Steadfastness is the mark of good soldiers (Phi 1:27b).
3. United effort is the spirit of good teamwork (Phi 1:27c).
4. Conviction in the cause of Christ is the key to valor (Phi 1:28).
5. Affliction for Christ is the honor of the arena (Phi 1:29–30).

H. Doctrine of the Crooked Stick

“What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered ... consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider; surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him” Ecc 1:15; 7:13–14.

1. God throws into every life a “crooked stick”— an adverse circumstance.
2. You cannot change it, but you can use it to grow.
3. The object is to make us strong out of weakness (2 Co 12:9; Heb 11:34).
4. When God throws you a crooked stick, be like a good dog, and bring it back to Him. He will turn it into blessing in accordance with His plan.
5. The Bible is full of examples of believers whose lives were blessed through the adverse conditions God permitted in their lives, for His glory!

II. Chapter 2: The Premise and Power of Providence

A. The Servant Mind (Phi 2:5–8)

Principle: Because Christ is my light (Phi 2:5–11), I can surrender in service, knowing He is working in and through me for His glory (Phi 2:12–13).

1. The Surrendered Life—Phi 2:1–11 (2:5). Four spiritual realities, leading to four objectives, require four-fold surrender!
2. A working partnership—Phi 2:12–18 (2:12–13). *“Fellow-workers with God”* (1 Co 3:9).
3. Two living examples—Phi 2:19–30 (Phi 2:20–21).

B. Principles of Application (Phi 2):
(Key Verse: Phi 2:5)

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ...”

C. The Premise is the Cross of Christ (Phi 2:1–11)

1. The finished work of Christ secures certain divine facts/realities (Phi 2:1).
2. These become the foundation of all true joy in life (Phi 2:2a).
3. When we reckon on these facts, they have a transforming effect on our lives (Phi 2:2b–4).
4. Living faith appropriates the mind of Christ in our life (Phi 2:5).
5. His willing humiliation is reproduced by God’s Spirit (Phi 2:6–8).
6. God’s exaltation of Him achieves the ultimate goal of history, the glorification of God (Phi 2:9–11).
7. What God did in Christ, He desires to replicate in our lives (cf. 1Pe 5:6, Jam 4:10).

D. Principle: What God did through the surrender of Christ to the cross, He will do for you if you faithfully submit to His ordained afflictions for you.

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” Luk 9:23.

1. God has chosen affliction as the means to refine faith (1Pe 1:6–9).
2. We ought not to consider this a strange means, in light of the cross (1Pe 4:12–13).
3. If we will humble ourselves, God will surely exalt us in the perfection of His perfect timing (1Pe 5:6; Jam 4:10).

E. The Power is in Obedience in Attitude and Action (Phi 2:12–18)

1. The key is obedience stemming from devotion to God (Phi 2:12a).
2. Faith is an active partnership with divine providence, bringing deliverance out of apparent disaster (Phi 2:12).
3. In this partnership, God works the willing and doing of His purpose, through the indwelling Spirit and implanted Word (Phi 2:13; cf. Eph 3:7, 20; Jam 1:21).
4. Faith response to adversities allows God to take the crooked things of life and make them straight for His glory (Phi 2:14–15).
5. Only as we “hold fast the word of life” can these victories become realities in our lives (Phi 2:16).
6. Only by living in harmony with the providence of God can we know true joy, whether we live or die (Phi 2:17–18; cf. Phi 1:21–26).

F. Two Living Examples of Providence at Work (Phi 2:19–30)

1. Timothy, Phi 2:19–24
 - a. Timothy was a unique provision of God for the Philippians (Act 16:1–5).
 - b. Timothy modeled his life after the Apostle Paul (Phi 2:20–21).

- c. His proven character was the guarantee of his worth (Phi 2:22–24).
2. Epaphroditus, Phi 2:25–30
 - a. Take note of Paul’s five-fold identification of him (Phi 2:25).
 - b. See how unselfishly, sacrificially he spent himself (Phi 2:26–28).
 - c. He was worthy of esteem equal to his self-sacrifice (Phi 2:29–30).

G. The Doctrine of the End of the Matter

“A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth ... the end of a thing is better than it’s beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Ecc 7:1, 8).

1. These statements are true only when we factor in the providence of God.
2. No one is born with a good name. Just like Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, or the Philippians, we must earn a “*proven reputation*” (Phi 2:22).
3. The only way this can be gained is not by self-seeking, but through seeking to know Christ fully (Phi 2:21; 3:7–8, 10).
4. But we are not made whole except by being broken. Thus it takes a lifetime in pursuit of God’s purpose for our life (Phi 3:12–14).
5. God uses the “crooked things” He has ordained in each life to break our pride and bring us into submission to His providential plan.
6. As we submit to His refining process, and participate with His providence, we “*lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of [us]*” (Phi 3:12).
7. The result is that the end of every trial is better than its beginning, and the conclusion of our life is eternally better than its start.

III. Chapter 3: The Provisions and Decisions of Providence

A. The Spiritual Mind (Phi 3:7).

Principle: Since Christ is my hope (Phi 3:20–21), I can set my mind on eternity, and make decisions that seem radical here (on earth, during time), that will glorify Christ (Phi 3:7–14).

1. The mind set on the flesh (Phi 3:1–6 cf. Rom 8:6–8).
2. The mind set on the Spirit (Phi 3:7–14 cf. Rom 8:3–5, 9-11,14). Here Paul lays out his decision to follow Luk 9:23 in his life.
3. The mind set on heaven (Phi 3:15–21).

B. Principles of Application (Phi 3):
(Key Verse: Phi. 3:7)

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.”

C. The Danger of Dogs and Dead Lions (Phi 3:1–6)

1. Rejoicing is not inconsistent with a state of conflict (Phi 3:1, 3). Rather, our joy is a celebration of the finished work of Christ in our behalf.
2. Paul compares the Judaizers to dogs: they run in packs, feed on garbage, and attack the weak (Phi 3:2).
3. Paul uses his own experience as a Pharisee to show the “vanity” of the pursuit of self-promotion and self-exaltation.

D. The Volitional Prerogative of the Believer (Phi 3:7–14)

1. The decision, at its root, is that of choosing Christ over self (Phi 3:7–8a). Our “*gain*” is self-centered and vain. Note the contrast “*to me*” and “*for Christ.*” Truly, “*He who loses his life shall find it*” (Mat 16:25).
2. The “*gain*” of Christ is experiential knowledge of five things (Phi 3:8–11):
 - a. The righteousness acquired through faith alone.
 - b. The enabling power of His resurrection life.
 - c. The voluntary fellowship of His sufferings.
 - d. A life that conforms to the purpose of His death.
 - e. The ultimate attainment of resurrection out of death.
3. This requires a daily decision in the pursuit of His plan (Phi 3:12–14):
 - a. The certainty of His providential purpose for individuals.
 - b. The humility to acknowledge our present failure.
 - c. A willingness to forget past failures and successes.
 - d. The certainty that eternal reward is promised/available.
 - e. The endurance to “press on” in the face of all obstacles.

E. The Divergent Paths of Maturity vs. Carnality (Phi 3:15–21)

1. The Path of Maturity
 - a. The mature believer seeks to live by the mind of Christ (Phi 3:15a).
 - b. At the same time, there is a willingness to be corrected as God gives illumination (Phi 3:15b).
 - c. Maturity recognizes that ground can be lost, thus strives to maintain spiritual gains made through difficulties and afflictions (Phi 3:16).
 - d. The mature believer must both choose for the standard of Christ and the example of Paul, and against those who have chosen self-centered living (Phi 3:17).
 - e. Above all, the mature believer lives in the light of Christ’s return and our eternal heavenly citizenship (Phi 3:20-21). The assurance we will be like Him in eternity should spur us to be like Him now.

2. The Path of Carnality
 - a. Dedication to the ways of this world constitutes a state of hostility toward God (Phi 3:18; cf. Jam 4:4; 1 Jo 2:15–17).
 - b. To be an “enemy of the cross” means to be fighting against its work in one’s life. The carnal believer resists the Christ-conforming work of the cross in his or her life.
 - c. The “mind-set” of the carnal believer seeks gratification through indulgence (the belly) and glorification through human effort. They have a cosmic mind-set (cf. Rom 8:5–8; Jam 3:14–16).
- F. Doctrine: A Live Dog, or a Dead Lion?
1. Ecc 9:4: *“Better a live dog than a dead lion.”*
 2. Saul of Tarsus was considered a real “lion” (Phi 3:4–6), but he was spiritually dead.
 3. We may be considered to be less than a “dog” (2 Sam 9:8; Mar 7:27–28).
 4. However, if we possess the life of Christ, we are infinitely superior to the great “lions” of history. But we must choose abundant life as well (Joh 10:10).
 5. Sooner or later, all of life comes down to the choices we make (Jos 24:15a)!
 6. The path chosen by Paul (Phi 3:7–8), like that of His Lord (Phi 2:5–8), shows that the only way up in God’s economy is down!

IV. Chapter 4: Making Progress in the School of Providence

A. The Strengthened Mind (Phi 4:13)

Principle: Since Christ is my source of strength (Phi 4:13), I can rejoice in my progress of increasing conformity to His likeness (Phi 4:11–13).

1. Strengthened by prayer (Phi 4:1–7)
2. Strengthened by exercise (Phi 4:8–13 cf. Heb 5:12–6:3)
3. Strengthened by giving (Phi 4:14–20 cf. 2 Co 8:1–7, 9; 9:10–14)

B. Principles of Application (Phi 4) (Key Verse: Phi 4:13)

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

C. Paul’s Exhortation to Fellow Citizens of Heaven (Phi 4:1–9)

They are his *“joy and crown.”* Their continued stability would affect his eternal reward (cf. 2Jo 8). Their steadfastness depended on:

1. Determined reliance on their risen Lord (Phi 4:1).
2. Unity of mind and purpose with other faithful believers (Phi 4:2–3).
3. Perpetuated joy based on the finished work of Christ (Phi 4:4).

4. A testimony to the world of surrendered lives (Phi 4:5).
5. Prayers that conquer anxiety and bring peace of mind (Phi 4:6–7).
6. Meditation on, obedience to, worthy things (Phi 4:8–9).

D. Paul’s Example of Growing in Grace (Phi 4:10–13)

1. By learning contentment in God’s plan. The verb “learned” is the root word for discipleship (Mat 28:19).
2. By gaining experiential knowledge in every situation. This “know how” is skill built through practice.
3. By coming to total reliance on Jesus Christ.

E. The Philippians’ Investment in Eternity (Phi 4:13–20)

Their involvement in Paul’s ministry brought blessing to many, and gained assurance for them of God’s continued supply.

1. Their past support (Phi 4:14–16; cf. 2 Co 8:1–5)
2. Their present offering (Phi 4:17–18)
3. Their future assurance (Phi 4:19–20)

V. Conclusion: Phi 4:21–23

These greetings include “*those of Caesar’s household.*” The Philippian believers played a part in winning them to Christ! The concluding prayer: “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,*” is the essence of the providence of God!

Some Concluding Thoughts:

The Doctrine of the Dull Ax

1. It is time to “sharpen the ax” (Ecc 10:10).
2. Life is very hard when lived in the energy of the flesh.
3. We must learn that the Christian life is not hard; it is impossible (in the flesh).
4. The “sharpening of the ax” may be likened to submission to the Holy Spirit.
5. Just as “*iron sharpens iron*” (Pro 27:17), so believers must do for each other!!!!
6. As we “*grow in grace and knowledge*” (2Pe 3:18) the “*ax*” of the soul sharpens the spiritual life, and the “*work*” (Phi 3:12) becomes easier.

The Ten Texts Supporting Providence (all illustrate Phi 2:5–11):

1. Phi 1:6: The finished work assured? Paul’s assurance comes from their active obedience and faithful participation.
2. Phi 1:12: Who can straighten what God made crooked? (Ecc 1:15; 7:13). Only God can take “*crooked*” situations and make them “*straight*” for His purpose.

3. Phi 1:21: Look at life from its ending (Ecc 7:8). If we believe the promise of the Gospel, this truth is self-evident.
4. Phi.1:29: The unexpected gift (Ecc 7:14). If suffering, endured in faith, works for glory (Rom 8:18), suffering is a “*gift*.”
5. Phi 2:12–13: Working out what God works in. Are we using a dull ax? (Ecc.10:10). The spiritual life is a partnership with God (1 Co 3:9). He works in; we work out.
6. Phi 3:7–8: The essential choice (cf. Ecc 12:1, 13). Ultimately, it all comes down to whether we live for Him, or for ourselves.
7. Phi 4:4: We can celebrate before the victory! (Rom 8:28, 37). To “*rejoice*” in sufferings (Jam 1:2) is to trust that God is faithful and will prevail.
8. Phi 4:6–7: The elements of spiritual contentment. Prayer is the act of entrusting all our affairs to a faithful and loving God, and resting!
9. Phi 4:11–13: The believer in the school of Christ (cf. Eph 4:20–24). Discipleship is a matter of learning, gaining skill, and demonstrating power.
10. Phi 4:19: “Blessed are the poor” (cf. Luk 6:20 and 2 Co 8:1–5). These believers were quite poor, yet out of their poverty, they supported both Paul and the church in Jerusalem! Because of the promises of God (Pro 13:7; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27), Paul is able to assure them that God will also richly provide for their needs!